

The Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 Handstamp

By Kevin P. Andersen

Until recently I had never heard of an instance where a postal marking device was moved from one post office to another and found used at both locations.

Several years ago, I located a cover with a blue Petersburg, Virginia, postmark and a handstamped "5" in the same color. This particular "5" did not look like the typical handstamped "5" with a straight-edged, blocky appearance, typical of the Petersburg types (Figure 1).

To the contrary, this newly discovered "5" had a more rounded appearance with smooth, curved lines (Figures 2 through 7).

I searched diligently for another occurrence of this handstamp marking, but to my surprise the only other examples I could find were from Norfolk, Virginia.

Not only did the two 5s look the same, I became convinced that they were, in fact, made by the same device! Was this a new discovery?

I reported this new "5" handstamp when the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* was being drafted and it was duly listed in the stampless section as Petersburg, Virginia (Type H). Much of the handstamp's history, however, evaded me and many questions remain.

Oftentimes one font looks just like any other, but in this case there is a telltale gash that makes this handstamp "5" unique.

The gash appears as a colorless area in the horizontal top bar of the "5" and extends into



the top part of the half-circle portion of the numeral. The gash makes the Norfolk "5" easily recognizable. It is most noticeable in good impressions, whereas heavily inked impressions tend to somewhat fill-in the gash.

A remarkable example of the Norfolk "5" with the gash is found in Figure 2. This was cropped from a cover from Norfolk wherein the "5" was used as a postmaster's provisional. Norfolk continued to use the same "5" throughout its Confederate period, both as provisional usage early in the Confederate period and later as a handstamp (Figures 4 and 5) to denote either due or paid postage. The interesting twist to the Norfolk "5" handstamp is that the same gash is found in the Petersburg "5" handstamp.

To date, I know of only two such examples of this "5" being used at Petersburg, making it, in my opinion the rarest of the Petersburg stampless markings (Figures 6 through 9).

The cover depicted in Figure 9 was a unique example in my collection for several years until another recently surfaced (Figure 8) that actually pre-dates Figure 9's usage.

The discovery of the second cover serves to confirm the Petersburg connection as not merely an anomaly where a cover was handstamped at Norfolk and somehow found use at Petersburg.

For purposes of identification, I will refer to the Petersburg usage of the Norfolk "5" as the "Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5."



Figure 1

Figure 2

2 Detail

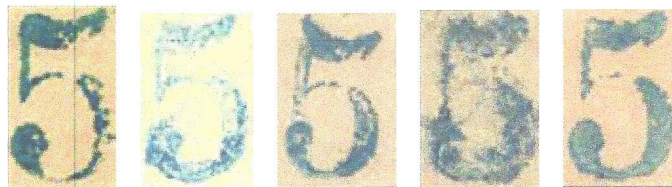


Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 1: A typical Petersburg, Va., handstamped 5.

Figure 2: Norfolk, Va., handstamped 5 Postmaster's Provisional. (Courtesy Trish Kaufmann)

Figure 2 detail showing the gashes.

Figures 3-7 show the comparison of the 5s with the gashes.

Figure 3: Norfolk unused provisional

Figure 4: Norfolk (Due) 5 CDS dated JAN/24/1862

Figure 5: Norfolk PAID 5 CDS dated JUL/13/1861

Figure 6: Petersburg (Due) 5 CDS dated JUL/4/(1862)

Figure 7: Petersburg DUE 5 CDS dated MAY/29/(1864)

Figure 8:
The earliest documented
date of use—July 4, (1862).



Historical Context

Petersburg is located some 75 miles northwest of Norfolk and is the closest major city in Virginia to Norfolk (Richmond being another 25 miles to the north). It was the terminus point of the Norfolk-Petersburg Railroad.

During the Civil War, Petersburg was a vital link supplying Gen. Robert E. Lee's army as well as the Confederate capital at Richmond. It would be the logical choice to move supplies from Norfolk to Petersburg when it appeared that Norfolk would fall to Union forces.

Norfolk fell to Union forces on May 10, 1862, therefore, any Petersburg usage of the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 must be after that date, presuming the device was moved to Petersburg sometime around the fall of Norfolk.

With so few known examples of the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5, any conclusions drawn must necessarily be merely a foundation upon which future studies will build.

The use of the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 is a mystery in and of itself. The fact that it was used at least on two different dates, approximately 22 months apart and apparently not any more than that, is even more of a mystery!

Dates of Use

To date, I have found only two examples of the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5, thus we have a tentative earliest documented date of use and latest documented date of use and is highly susceptible to change if additional examples surface. Determining the respective dates of usage was difficult to say the least.

Figure 8 illustrates the earliest documented date of use for the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5: July 4, (1862).

This cover bears the soldier's endorsement

"G. T. Lavender/11th Va. Reg" and is addressed to a relative in Lynchburg, Virginia. The cover bears a blue "PETERSBURG/ Va.//JUL/4" postmark and the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5, a manuscript "truce" marking and a blue Lynchburg, Va. "DUE 5" handstamp.

Searching the combined military service records (CMSR) I found a Pvt. Green T. Lavender, who enrolled for service in the 11th Regiment, Virginia Volunteers, at Lynchburg on April 23, 1861.²

Pvt. Lavender was wounded at the battle of Williamsburg, Virginia, and was among those captured on May 6, 1862. He was taken to the Chesapeake Hospital at Hampton, Virginia, (Fort Monroe) and was ultimately paroled on September 12, 1862.

The timing of his being held at Chesapeake Hospital coincides with the short-lived POW mail route southbound via Petersburg (May to September 1862).³

Regarding the franking, I speculate that the initial due rate of "5" no doubt should have been "10" as the new rate took effect on July 1, 1862. The oversight by the clerk was remedied upon arrival at Lynchburg.

Figure 9 illustrates the latest documented date of use for the Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5: May 29, (1864).

This cover is addressed to Mrs. Julius A. Blake at "Charleston, So. Ca." It is franked with a single CSA Scott 7 tied to the cover by a blue "PETERSBURG Va./MAY/29" postmark.

There is also a handstamped "DUE" and Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 marking, as well as an unidentifiable manuscript marking.

When I find covers so addressed and franked with a "DUE" marking, I suspect that they were personally addressed by the soldier and that



Figure 9:
The latest documented date
of use—May 29, (1864).

is where I begin my search. The handwriting has a number of distinctive characteristics and matching it to other sources of Julius A. Blake's handwriting proved the authorship of the cover⁴ (see Figures 10 and 11).

Knowing who mailed the letter made determining the date of usage much easier. I found that Lt. Col. Julius A. Blake spent considerable time in the area of Charleston, South Carolina, however, his regiment was moved from James Island, South Carolina, in early May 1864 to protect the city of Petersburg from Gen. Butler's advance on the city.⁵

This places Lt. Col. Blake in the Petersburg vicinity in May 1864, precisely when the letter was mailed. It is curious that the cover was initially franked with only a single five-cent stamp when the rate had changed nearly two years earlier. Perhaps Lt. Col. Blake had only one stamp available at the time and saw fit to ease the financial burden on his wife when she picked up the mail.

We will probably never know why, but had he applied a full 10 cents, we wouldn't have this highly interesting cover!

In the end, the clues left prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Norfolk handstamped 5 was moved to, and found limited use at, Petersburg. This may be a unique situation where a postal marking device was moved from one post office to another and found use at both. Not only that, but there is sufficient evidence to lay the groundwork for a specific period of time the handstamped "5" was in use at Petersburg. The question of why may well have been lost to time.

I would very much like to correspond with anyone who has one of these Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 usages.



Figure 10: Detail of Blake's signature in Figure 9.

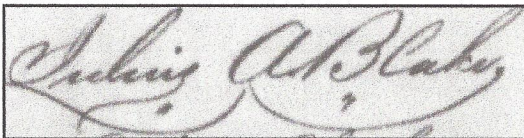


Figure 11: Detail of Blake's signature taken from his CMSR.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

- 1 While the day date of the CDS appears to be "14," the "1" is actually part of a filler block that is found on many Petersburg postmarks. Additionally, the month date, especially the "L" of "JUL" bears the typical upper right artifact that makes the "L" look as if it is an "E."
- 2 National Archives CMSR, Lavender, Green T. Co. G, 11 Virginia Inf'y.
- 3 Steven C. Walske and Scott R. Trepel, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History* (2008), pp. 67-68.
- 4 National Archives CMSR, Blake, Julius A., Charleston Battalion.
- 5 *Report of the Historian of the Confederate Records to the General Assembly of South Carolina*, Columbia, S.C.: The Bryan Printing Co., State Printers, (1900), pp 71-72.

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